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Participatory development or participatory democracy? Linking participatory approaches to policy and governance

by JOHN GAVENTA

Introduction

Over the last decade, we have seen a broadening in the uses of participatory methods and approaches from projects to policies, from the involvement of 'beneficiaries' to those of rights-bearing citizens, and from a concern with programme implementation and evaluation to processes of decision-making and democracy itself. With this shift, participatory approaches have inevitably entered the arenas of government and found themselves confronting issues of policy influence and institutional change. Simultaneously, as concerns about government responsiveness grew within development debates, questions about how citizens engage and make demands on the state also came to the fore.

There are many reasons for the increased concern with linking participation and governance:

• In the policy arena, we have seen a widening of understandings of the policy process from being the domain of elected representatives, bureaucrats and experts, to include concerns with inclusion of citizens and a recognition of the importance of different forms of experiential, as well as expert knowledge. With this shift citizens move from being simply users or choosers of public services policies made by others, to 'makers and shapers' of policies themselves (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2000).

• In many countries of the South, the last decade has seen the ushering in of new forms of democratic decentralisation. While often driven by a neo-liberal agenda for weakening the central state, decentralisation has simultaneously opened up new opportunities for democratic engagement, especially in countries where strong legislation helped to guarantee participation in governance as a right.

• In the North, as citizens participate less and less through traditional means of engagement, there is rising debate about 'the democratic deficit'. In response, we have seen the flourishing of support and opportunities for new forms of engagement, ranging from traditional citizen consultation methods (e.g. hearings) to a vast array of more innovative forms of public participation and deliberation.

• In the development arena, we have seen increasing focus on a 'rights-based approach' to development, which argues for the rights of citizens to be engaged in the decisions and processes which affect their lives (see also Pettit and Musyoki, this issue).

In response to these larger trends, a number of participatory initiatives around the world have sought to link citizens and states in new ways. Such innovations go under various labels, ranging from participatory democracy, to deliberative democracy, to 'empowered participatory governance' (Fung and Wright, 2003:5). While widely variant and in many different contexts, several common characteristics underlie these various initiatives. These include:

Cover of *PLA Notes* 40: Deliberative Democracy & Citizen Empowerment

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The changing debate: a *Participatory Learning and Action* review

None of these issues will be new to the readers of *Participatory Learning and Action*. A review of past issues shows how this network of practitioners and researchers has moved with the debate, and no doubt in some instances has contributed to shaping it as well.

One of my first encounters with the PLA network came in 1996, when as a new fellow at IDS, I participated in two workshops which brought together some 70 PRA practitioners from over 30 countries to examine how participatory initiatives could contribute to policy change, and in turn, to changing the structures, procedures and cultures of large institutions, including government (See *PLA Notes* 27, October 1996). One of the key concerns at the time was how participatory approaches could inform policy by exposing policy makers to local people's priorities and realities. Looking back, at this stage, the primary concern was how participation strengthened voice through better generation of knowledge and views to policy makers, and perhaps less with the direct engagement of citizens as full participants in the policy process itself.

Related issues included how to scale up participatory approaches to influence large-scale policy institutions, while not losing concern with quality and genuine local involvement. Even then, there was also a concern with the 'rigid, mechanistic and unimaginative ways' through which large-scale institutions were applying participatory approaches from above. The editors of the issue warned that 'simply because an institution has made a policy decision to employ a participatory approach does not necessarily mean that it is using it in a responsive, dynamic and flexible manner' (in *ibid*

- A concern with more **active and participatory forms of citizenship**. Such views go well beyond the notions of citizens as consumers, as articulated during the 1980s and early 1990s, to citizens who engage in policies and in the delivery of services. They also profess to go beyond consultation to deeper, more empowered forms of involvement.
- A concern with **inclusion**, especially of racial and ethnic minorities, youth, older people, and others seen as previously excluded or marginalized.
- A simultaneous concern with involvement of **multiple stakeholders** in new forms of partnership, which in turn enable wider 'ownership' of decisions and projects.
- An emphasis on broader forms of **accountability**, which enable multiple partners to hold institutions and policy makers to account, and which involve social accountability as well as legal, fiscal and political forms.

Through this approach, the hope is that participation will not only contribute to overcoming the 'democratic deficit' through better governance and a more engaged citizenry, but also that participation will meet developmental goals of improved communities and service delivery.

The extent to which these promises are being realised in new participatory initiatives is now widely debated around the globe. What has become clear, however, is that realising new forms of participatory governance and development is full of challenges. Participatory governance is not simply achieved from above with new policy statements, but

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p.26). In light of the ways that the PRSPs have since been used to mandate participation from above, the warning was a propitious one, as no doubt the forthcoming issue of *Participatory Learning and Action* 51 on practitioners' experiences with PRSPs will reflect.

In *PLA Notes* 40 (February, 2001) on deliberative democracy and citizen empowerment, a somewhat contrasting view emerges of how citizens engage in the governance process. In this issue, the focus shifts away from how participation helps **inform** policy-makers, to new ways in which citizens participate directly in policy processes; and from a concern with better, more informed policy, to a concern with the nature of democracy itself. The issue highlights a number of mechanisms for citizen engagement in the policy process, which extended beyond the rich PRA tradition that had emerged in development, such as citizens' juries, consensus conferences, and scenario workshops. Many of these approaches draw from thinking in democratic theory, which puts great emphasis on the quality of deliberation, e.g. the process through which different views are exchanged and debated to create better policy. While such deliberative processes have been used largely in the North, they also have been tried in the South, such as is highlighted in *PLA Notes* 46 on the Prajateerpu project in India, where citizen juries were used with farmers and other stakeholders to engage with debates on agricultural and other development policies.

PLA Notes 44 (July, 2002) adds to the debate by looking at the widespread take-up of participatory processes in local governance, including participatory budgeting, participatory planning, and participation in stakeholder dialogue and conflict resolution. The editors of that volume raise the possibility that perhaps the North has much to learn from such approaches. Indeed the take-up in the North of participatory approaches drawn from the South has been rapid, as seen for example in the use now of participatory budgeting in the city of Manchester, England, inspired by the process in Porto Alegre, Brazil (see also Flower and Johnson, this issue).

In reading back issues of Participatory Learning and Action for this article, I was struck with the different approaches to participation and policy found in the issues on deliberation and empowerment, and on participation in local governance, especially when compared with PLA Notes 43 on advocacy and citizen participation. Quoting from the excellent resource, *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics* (2002), the editors argue that 'advocacy is not just about getting to the table with a new set of interests, it's about changing the size and configuration of the table to accommodate a whole new set of actors'. The issue shares a number of rich case studies of other ways in which citizens engage with government, often from the outside, to demand the right to information or to open up new spaces for participation. In so doing it contributes lessons on linking participation to larger process of social transformation and changing power relationships.

While advocacy is also very much about participation and governance, it is rarely mentioned in the other issues on deliberation, on local governance, or the earlier issue on policy (and vice versa). And yet the strategies of deliberation, participation and advocacy often must all be used. A key challenge is to understand their relationship both conceptually and in practice. When in the process of gaining citizen voice in empowerment processes are advocacy approaches needed? When and how do groups make the transition from demanding a change in the shape of the table to **deliberating** around the table, sometimes with those against whom they have been **advocating**?

Multiple strategies and multiple methods

What is clear from the issues of *Participatory Learning and Action* over the last eight years is that a rich and robust range of methods and approaches are being used for strengthening participation in the areas of policy and governance. In future issues, more focus on understanding the **inter-relationships** of different approaches to strengthening citizens' voices and power might help us develop a fuller understanding of processes of deepening participatory governance.

In earlier work (2001), Anne-Marie Goetz and I review a number of mechanisms from around the world for strengthening the engagement of citizens and governments. In that work, we argue that the various approaches may be seen

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along a continuum, ranging from ways of strengthening voice on the one hand, to ways of strengthening receptivity to voice by government institutions on the other. The 'voice' end of the spectrum, we argue, must begin with examining or creating the pre-conditions for voice, through awareness-raising and building the capacity to mobilise – that is, the possibility for engagement cannot be taken as a given, even if mechanisms are created.

As citizens who are outside of governance processes begin to engage with government, there are a series of strategies through which their voices may be amplified, ranging from advocacy, to citizen lobbying for policy change, and citizen monitoring of performance. Then, as we move along the spectrum of engagement, there are the more formalised arenas in which civil society works with the state in the joint management and implementation of public services (through various forms of partnership), as well as in joint planning and deliberation.

Just as there are a number of mechanisms for amplifying voice, the paper argues, so these must also be strengthened by initiatives that strengthen the receptivity to voice within the state. These include government mandated forms of citizen consultation, standards through which citizens may hold government accountable, various incentives to encourage officials to be responsive to citizen voice, changes in organisational culture, and legal provisions which in various ways make participation in governance a legal right.

One of the most significant examples of how citizens have combined and used a number of different participatory strategies to engage in local governance has been in the Philippines. Following decades of authoritarian and centralised rule, the Local Government Code of 1991 in the Philippines was significant not only because it decentralised a number of powers to local government, but also because it created spaces for direct civil society engagement and participation at the local level. Just as significant as the new legal provisions, which opened up the potential of democratic space, was the way that civil society organisations – long used to struggling against the authoritarian state – now took up the challenge of engaging with the state in a way that would broaden and deepen these spaces by working to institutionalise peoples' participation in local governance.

What began as a small initiative known as the 'BATMAN' project emerged into a movement of NGOs, peoples' organisations, social movements and progressive local officials, loosely known as the Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium (BBGC) – one of the largest organised consortia working on participatory local governance anywhere in the

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world. The Consortium argues for a 'dual power' approach, e.g. gaining power within local government through strategies of collaboration and partnership, while also maintaining strong community organising strategies at the grassroots. It also argues for 'multiple lanes for engagement', which link community development, social movements, and political parties, with direct local governance strategies. Throughout all of these processes, the Consortium has used a variety of participatory methods creatively.

These lessons are captured in an excellent new book of case studies by practitioners involved in the BBGC (See Box 1). Through example and after example, the book documents that by using the dual power approach, which 'targets civil society, government and the democratic space in between', concrete gains can be made. Such gains include changing attitudes and behaviours, democratising and making more accountable local decision-making, strengthening the institutions of governance themselves, contributing to policy changes, and delivering basic services and livelihoods.

While both documenting and celebrating the contributions of their model, the authors also reflect very openly on the obstacles such work requires and the challenges they face. These include how to:
• challenge deeply engrained political cultures, including both the 'bossism' that persists amongst some officials, as well as the patron-client culture often found in the community;
• scale up and out from local levels to more national levels, and from rural to urban;
• deal with issues of serious conflict;
• carry our participatory work in areas with strong ethnic or religious minorities; and, most of all,
• institutionalise and sustain the gains that are made

Box 1: *Beyond Good Governance: participatory democracy in the Philippines* edited by Marisol Estrella and Nina T. Iszatt

This book brings together for the first time on-the-ground experiences in participatory governance of the Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium. There are ten case studies featured, each with its own unique story and lessons to share. Yet collectively, they describe how people are changing the way they are look at politics and their role in it. The case studies provide ample material to explore, expand, and challenge concepts and discourse on 'participation', 'good governance', and 'empowerment'. Participation in governance takes on new meanings, as ordinary citizens develop a personal stake in striving for genuine democratic change and transforming power relations and structures that perpetuate patronage, injustice, poverty and marginalization.

The book is published by the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD) in the Philippines. For more information on IPD, visit their website at www.ipd.ph or contact Institute of Popular Democracy, 45 Matimtiman Street, Teachers' Village, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

Email: logolinksea@ipd.org.ph.
Phone: +63 2 921 8049 or +63 2 434 6674
Fax : +63 2 926 2893

Box 2: *Citizens and Governance Toolkit*, published by the Commonwealth Foundation

An excellent new resource on citizens and governance has recently been published by the Commonwealth Foundation. The toolkit draws upon lessons from 19 action learning projects carried out by partners across the Commonwealth countries. It includes sections on the concept and meanings of inclusive governance, and on various strategies for engagement including citizen organising, promoting multi-sectoral partnerships, participatory methods, and capacity building for inclusive governance. The toolkit also explores themes related to gender, power, conflict, traditional forms of governance, youth, citizenship education and the media. It is accompanied by an interactive CD-ROM.

For further information, see www.commonwealthfoundation.com, or email andrewf@commonwealth.int. The Commonwealth Foundation address is Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London, SW1Y 5HY, United Kingdom. Tel: +44 20 7930 3783. Fax: +44 20 7839 8157

Box 3: Resources for participation and local governance: The LogoLink Network

LogoLink is a global network of practitioners from civil society organisations, research institutions and governments working to deepen democracy through greater citizen participation in local governance. LogoLink encourages learning from field-based innovations and expressions of democracy, which contribute to social justice.

LogoLink is coordinated by the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies (www.ids.ac.uk), and works closely with partners in different regions of the world, including the Instituto Polis in Brazil; Grupo Nacional de Trabajo para la Participación in Bolivia; the Institute for Popular Democracy in the Philippines; the Society for Participatory Research in Asia, in India; DENIVA, in Uganda; and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium in the United States.

The LogoLink web pages contain a number of resources on participation and local governance, including recent research on legal frameworks for citizen participation, participatory planning, and participation in local budgets and resource decisions. For more information contact: www.ids.ac.uk/logolink or email: LogoLink@ids.ac.uk
Tel: +44 1273 877532 or 606261 ext 7532. Fax: +44 1273 621202

through local community action.

Further issues are also raised about the challenges of linking civil and political society, either through forging more genuine partnerships between local governments, NGOs, and peoples' organisations, or through working closely with political parties, such as in the Philippines case, Akbayan!, the 'peoples' party' with which many of the Consortium members are also affiliated.

Towards participation as a right of citizens

Regardless of the methods or strategies used, participatory approaches are more likely to have the greatest potential for influence when they can be strengthened by claims to participation as a legal right. The **right to participation** is potentially a more empowered form of engagement than participation **by invitation** of governments, donors, or higher authorities.

One area in which rights to participation are being embodied into law is that of local governance. In 2003, LogoLink, a network of practitioners and researchers working on strengthening participation and local governance, carried out research in 19 countries on the legal frameworks which have the potential of enabling and strengthening citizen participation (see Box 3.) While the legal frameworks are not sufficient by themselves, they can provide an enabling factor to more empowered forms of participation. A number of approaches have developed.

Joint approaches to planning

In the **Philippines** for instance, the 1991 Local Government Code requires citizen participation at all levels of local government through the local development councils. Participation is mandated in the areas of development planning, education, health, bids and contracts, and policing. In theory, the LGC also provides for direct representation of civil society and voluntary organisations on local government bodies, though this has been uneven in its implementation. Legislation also

mandates funds for training of citizen representatives in order for them to participate effectively (McGee *et al*, 2003).

Perhaps the largest scale experiment in the joint approach is found in **Brazil**, where the new Constitution of 1988, termed at the time the Citizens' Constitution, affirmed public participation in the delivery of local services as a democratic right. This has resulted in the creation across the country of municipal level councils which link elected officials, neighbourhood representatives and service providers in almost every sector, including health, education and youth. The scale of these initiatives is enormous. In the case of health, for instance, over 5,000 health councils were created by the 1988 Constitution, mandated to bring together representatives of neighbourhoods, social movements and civil society organisations with service providers and government representatives to govern health policy at the local level.

Changing forms of accountability

Further innovations have not only emphasised citizen involvement with local governments in planning, but also empowered citizen representatives to hold government to account for not carrying out properly the functions of government.

In **Bolivia**, the Law of Popular Participation of 1994 mandated broad-based participatory processes, starting at the neighbourhood level, as part of the process of local government decentralisation. It also recognised the importance of social organisations that already existed (including indigenous communities, with their own practices and customs). About 15,000 such 'territorial base organisations' are registered to participate in the planning process. However, in addition, the particular innovation of the Bolivia law was legally to create citizens' oversight or Vigilance committees in each municipality, which are empowered to freeze municipal budgets if actual expenditures vary too far from the planning processes. Again, the actual implementation of these laws varies greatly, due to differences in understandings, power relations, citizens' awareness, etc. in differing localities.

Empowered forms of local direct participation

While many approaches are looking for new forms of a joint relationship between citizens and elected representatives, others are creating forms of direct citizen participation, which complement representative forms of governance with more empowered, direct involvement of citizens at the local level. In **Brazil**, large-scale neighbourhood meetings may be used as part of the process of participatory planning or budgeting. (In Porto Alegre, estimates are that over 100,000

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people, representing some 10% of the population, have attended a participatory budgeting meeting at least once over the fourteen years of the initiative.) In **India**, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments gave local governments (the *panchayati raj* system) the task of planning for economic development and social justice[1]. In theory this process begins at the village level, or the *gram sabha*, though this varies in practice across states. In the State of Madhya Pradesh, a new law was passed in 2001 which virtually transferred all powers concerning local development to the village assemblies, including powers related to village development, budgeting, levying taxes, agriculture, natural resource management, village security, infrastructure, education and social justice (McGee, 2003:49). In Kerala, as part of the People's Planning Campaign, local governments received 40% of the state budget allocation for local services. Grassroots planning processes were carried out in thousands of villages, which were then approved by direct vote in popular village assemblies.

Strengthening the inclusive representation of locally-elected bodies

Another strategy employed in certain countries has been to try to make local councils more inclusive of traditionally excluded populations. For instance, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in **India**, mentioned above, mandated that one-third of the seats should be reserved for women, as well as one-third of the offices of the chairperson. Similar reservations have been made for those of the lower castes and tribes. While making local councils more inclusive, the Constitution also gave them a great deal more power for planning for 'economic development and social justice' in 29 separate areas of local development, including forests, education and irrigation. While the implementation

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[1] For information, see also Ahal and Descurtins, in *PLA Notes* 49: Community-based planning. April 2004.

Box 4: Reshaping local democracy through participatory governance

A recent issue of *Environment & Urbanization*, based on case studies from Latin America, the Philippines, Kenya and elsewhere, focuses on some of the challenges and dilemmas of implementing modes of participatory governance. It discusses the developing awareness and significance of governance in development and the environment, and its importance in arenas such as poverty reduction, inclusion, environmental protection and public services.

Are local governments able to give more power to poorer groups? And support their capacities for action and partnerships? Can the urban poor make creative contributions to better urban management? The last ten years have seen many local governments, citizen groups and social movements developing more participatory ways of working together. Much has been made possible by more democratic and decentralised government structures and by bottom-up pressures. Even more has been made possible by citizens and civil society organisations demonstrating coherent and realistic alternative approaches to development.

The brief describes some of these new approaches and assesses their effectiveness. It includes a discussion of the following:

• how innovations in more participatory governance were driven by federations formed by the urban poor in Cambodia, the Philippines and Kenya; these provided local governments with effective development models, and developed new grassroots capacity to make such partnerships work;
• the diverse experiences with participatory budgeting in 25 urban centres in Latin America and elsewhere;
• the strengths and limitations of participatory governance initiatives driven by top-down processes (Costa Rica, and Andhra Pradesh in India) and bottom-up pressures (Vietnam, and Cebu in the Philippines);
• the difficulties in getting service providers to be accountable to citizen groups; and
• the difficulties in changing state structures to allow more power to poorer groups both in India (through a discussion of the National Campaign for Housing Rights) and in South Korea.

The examples in this briefing paper highlight the importance of participatory governance for improving and extending access to services and infrastructure. They also demonstrate the very real benefits for local communities and the state that can result from greater political inclusion. However, these innovations in participatory

governance face difficulties when powerful groups oppose them and when bureaucratic systems resist change. Three themes emerge from these case studies of participatory governance:
• the dynamic and embedded nature of participatory governance;
• the complexity of the relationships between participatory governance and representative democracy; and,
• the ways in which new institutional capacities themselves become part of the development process, increasing future options and possibilities.

It is easy for governments and international agencies to say that they want participatory governance; it is much less easy to change their structures and their relationships with poorer groups to allow this to happen.

Adapted from: 'Reshaping local democracy through participatory governance'. *Environment & Urbanization* Brief 9 This briefing paper summarises and is based on *Environment & Urbanization* Vol. 16:1 Participatory Governance, April 2004, IIED: London, UK. Also available online at: www.iied.org/urban/pubs/eu_briefs.html

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of these new representation processes has been uneven, and while the local councils are not always granted adequate financing from central government, the inclusion of new members in the political processes has been vast. About one million women and about 600,000 lower caste or tribal members have now been elected to local government office.

While none of these approaches offers a panacea, they have created, through legislation, new roles for community leadership in relationship to local governance. However, the extent to which the legislation itself opens new spaces for participation varies a great deal, both according to the characteristics of the legal frameworks themselves, and the broader contextual situation in which they are a part.

What next? Challenges for deepening participatory governance

A great deal has been learnt, and much has changed, since the 1996 *PLA Notes* began to explore issues about citizen participation in policy processes. Then the questions were more about **whether** citizens could engage in a more participatory way in policy and governance processes, and **how** to

begin doing so. Following a decade of experience in many parts of the world, the new questions are less about whether citizen participation in policy and governance is a good thing, but more about how to deepen emergent forms of participatory governance, and what new problems emerge as citizens and governments do engage in new ways (see Box 4).

Whose democracy?

Inevitably as participatory processes enter the governmental arena, questions are raised about the nature of democracy itself. In both northern and southern countries, new debates are emerging about whether and how more participatory, deliberative or direct processes of engagement can revitalise and complement existing forms of representative democracy. Yet in these debates we need to be clear about whose versions of democracy we are talking about. The language of participation and democracy is now widely used by a range of actors, ranging from large multilateral institutions and powerful foreign aid programmes, to grassroots activists and social movements, but the words may have radically different meanings, with radically different consequences for putting

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them into practice. For some the agenda is one of less governance, driven by a neo-liberal, efficiency perspective; for others it is about strengthening local democracy through greater citizen participation; for others it is about using the spaces and opportunities of democracy for creating broader social change. Far more work needs to be done to articulate from below new versions and possibilities of what participatory governance and democracy might look like, and to be able to discern which models and approaches might best contribute to social justice.

What about the rest of the world?
Despite the spread of approaches to participatory governance in many parts of the world, many of the 'success' stories come from a relatively few countries (e.g. Brazil, Philippines, India, South Africa, some parts of the North) which share certain key characteristics. These are often places with relatively strong or at least functioning states, with strong civil societies, and often a social movement, party or strong political leadership which has worked to create new democratic spaces for participation. But as we know, many parts of the world do not share such characteristics. What are the strategies for building participatory governance in places with weak or non-functioning states, in regions of conflict and massive ethnic violence, in places with little history of organised civil society engagement?

In the rush to spread participatory approaches, especially as they are picked up by large multilateral institutions, there has been a tendency to transplant models of participation, without understanding whether the pre-conditions exist for such approaches to work, or without considering their appropriateness for local cultures and realities. Far more work needs to be done on the local political context, on how key concepts like deliberation, participation and decision-making are understood in local cultures, and on learning about what approaches for engagement and participation are appropriate to which settings. With the rise of conflict in regions around the world, work linking participatory approaches to conflict is also critical.

Which spaces of engagement are spaces for change?
Not all spaces for participation have the possibility to become spaces for real change. As recent work by the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability points out, simply creating a space for participation does not necessarily mean that it will become pro-poor (Cornwall and Coelho, 2004). Rather spaces are imbued and filled with power relations, affecting who enters them, who

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speaks with what knowledge and voice, and who benefits. Under some conditions participation without a shift in power simply serves to reinforce and legitimate the status quo. To be meaningful, participatory processes must engage with and change power relationships.

As governments, donors and large scale institutions issue more and more 'invitations for participation' to members of civil society and representatives of the poor, far more also needs to be understood about which spaces offer the possibility for meaningful voice and a shift in power relations, and which do not. When does it make sense to engage within 'invited' spaces, and when does it make more sense to remain outside? In *PLA Notes* 43 on Advocacy and Citizen Participation, the report from an international workshop, 'Making Change Happen' includes the development of clear 'criterion for engagement' as one of the key priorities for the field. 'Using such guidelines, citizens and civil society groups can better decide when, whether and how to engage in policy processes.'

Who speaks for whom? The challenge of representation
Often, debates about democracy have contrasted representative forms of participation, in which leaders are elected by their constituents to represent them, and more direct or participatory forms of democracy. Yet participation also includes processes of representation, through which some speak for others as intermediaries in policy processes, often through claims to legitimacy other than elections. Increasingly, as governance processes are opened to diverse forms of engagement, questions are raised about who speaks for whom and on what basis.

For those of us concerned with democratic and participatory governance, far more work needs to be done simply to understand the complex webs of representation through which community voices reach and influence policy arenas. If leaders are elected from 'the community', who counts as that community? If representatives come from key organisa-

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tions, how are those organisations chosen and credentialed, and how are the leaders accountable to their members? If they are chosen to represent particular 'identities', who participates in that process and which 'identities' will be represented in broader public processes?

Participatory governance, economic inequality and resource control

A key conundrum for proponents of participation is the emergence of more and more potential spaces of democratic engagement in the last decade, which has also been accompanied by a rise of economic inequality in many countries and across the world. And even where opportunities for engagement have opened up, key decisions about economic policy are often 'off-limits' to public debate. One reason for this, as pointed out by a recent study by Action Aid (2004), is that key issues related to economic policies – be they fiscal policy, monetary policy, privatisation, trade, labour, or foreign investments – are often not on the table. At the national and global levels, this suggests that a key challenge is how to develop strategies and approaches for civil society engagement in these economic arenas.

A potential space for engagement on economic issues is found in the involvement of citizens in issues of resource mobilisation and allocation at the local government level and in monitoring how budgets are used. And, where resources can be seen to be generated or re-allocated through community participation and representation, then such engagement is more likely to be seen to be making a difference. In Porto Alegre, for instance, popular participation and engagement in the budgeting process continues to expand year by year. In part, Navarro (1998:68) argues, this is because people could see outcomes of their engagement. These included a reduction in corruption and malpractice, an improvement in the political behaviour or elected and bureaucratic local officials, and, most significantly, a redistribution of resources through higher taxes on the middle class and wealth sectors, and a change of spending towards the priorities of deprived and poor. But is the Porto Alegre experience replicable? More work needs to be done on the ways in which citizens exercise greater voice and influence on budget processes in other settings as well.

Documenting outcomes: what difference does participation make?

After almost a decade of work on participation in policy and governance by those associated with *Participatory Learning and Action* and others, a final challenge is to learn more about what difference participation makes to governance and policy and under what conditions. There are several ways in which such outcomes can be examined. Some approaches look at the democracy-building outcomes, e.g. how participation strengthens capacities, resources and cultures for deepening democracy. Others look at the policy outcomes, e.g. how engagement led to policies or decisions which otherwise might not have happened. Others might look at the development outcomes, e.g. how participatory governance actually makes a difference to the lives and material conditions of those on the ground. Many different approaches could be used, but to do so is critical. Without evidence that more participatory and inclusive policies and forms of governance make a difference to the lives of ordinary people, the spread and deepening of democracy will be hard to sustain.

CONTACT DETAILS
John Gaventa
Participation Group,
Institute of Development Studies,
University of Sussex,
Brighton BN1 9RE.
Tel: +44 1273 606261
Fax: +44 1273 621202
Email: j.p.gaventa@ids.ac.uk

Websites: IDS Participation Group:
www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip
DRC on Citizenship, Participation and
Accountability: www.ids.ac.uk/drc-citizen
Logolink (Participation and Local Governance):
www.ids.ac.uk/logolink

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
John Gaventa is a fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, where he is the coordinator of the Participation Group. He also works with LogoLink, a network on participation and local governance, and is Director of the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability. He has written widely on issues of power, participation and governance in both North and South.

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